

Church risk checklist

Working at height

Working at height is one of the most dangerous things you can do. That is why it is taken so seriously by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Most serious accidents and fatalities at work result from falling from a height.

In many ways church buildings are more hazardous than most workplaces such as offices and factories. Compared to these, churches are often very lofty and with difficult access, and the majority were built at a time when health and safety was not a consideration.

Unlike other activities that carry a risk of injury, a fall from a height is more likely to result in serious injuries and can be fatal. A single moment of carelessness or absent-mindedness could result in a lifetime of disability.

Common working at height activities can include:

Inside:

- changing light bulbs
- cleaning, painting and decorating
- working in ringing and clock chambers
- accessing galleries
- putting up decorations and displays

Outside:

- replacing security light bulbs
- clearing leaves and vegetation from gutters and roofs
- applying SmartWater to lead roofs
- installing roof alarms
- general repairs

Checklist (check and tick as appropriate)

Before working at height, make sure you complete the checklist below. Check each item and tick 'yes' or 'no' as appropriate. **If you put 'no' next to any item, you must seek professional help with your working at height task.**

I will have someone with me when working at height	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
I will tell someone what I am doing and when I expect to return	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
I always carry a mobile phone or have a means of communicating with others	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
I have ensured that there is adequate lighting	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
I only use ladders for work of short duration	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
I ensure ladders are fixed in some way to prevent slipping	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
I ensure base of ladder is one unit out for every four units in height	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Important advice

Whenever possible, use a tower scaffold, fixed scaffolding or mobile elevated work platform (MEWP) in place of a ladder. Anyone erecting and using such equipment MUST be trained.

Take great care when working in areas that have not been accessed for a long time, such as balconies.

Check balcony rails are safe and trap doors are not rotten. **Never walk on a floor you think may not be safe.**

If necessary, have a professional survey carried out before starting work. Place warning signs to advise others if an area is not safe, and keep the area locked.

Next steps

Once you have reviewed this checklist you should also then complete a risk assessment using the risk assessment form available at: www.methodistinsurance.co.uk/resources/church-guidance
You should ensure that you keep a copy of this form for your records.

General advice

Elimination of risk

The best control measure of all is to eliminate the risk entirely. Before undertaking the task ask yourselves: *“Is this something we have the equipment and capabilities to do ourselves or should we seek outside help?”* and *“Is there another way of achieving what we want?”* For example, could a mechanism be installed to lower light fittings to ground level to change bulbs or could longer life bulbs be used?

Health and safety law and the duty of care

A Church Council owes a duty of care to all volunteers and can be prosecuted under The Health and Safety at

Work etc. Act 1974. **Remember - before using a ladder or entering a disused balcony, ask yourself: “Am I really sure this is safe?”**

Further guidance

The Methodist Insurance website contains a wealth of information and advice to help you look after your church. Our Church Health and Safety Guidance Notes also contain detailed advice on working at height and the safe use of ladders. You can read the full guidance at www.methodistinsurance.co.uk/resources/church-guidance



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